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Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLITES

* United Nations must direct its limited resources to world's highest priorities, focusing on tasks it performs best, United States Secretary of State tells General Assembly.

* Foreign Minister of Togo says Africa needs more assistance to participate in global economy, including fairer commodity prices, technology transfers and debt reduction.

* Norwegian Foreign Minister calls on governments to empower United Nations to pursue its goals with renewed vigour; stresses need to narrow gap between rich and poor.

* Secretary-General expresses strong support for United States peace initiative in former Yugoslavia; says successful outcome will enable United Nations to reduce troop levels in region.

* Secretary-General calls on Abkhaz leadership to return to negotiating table with specific proposals to advance peace process.

* UNHCR urges Croatia to reconsider directive revoking refugee status of tens of thousands of Bosnians; says forced repatriation would violate Geneva Convention on Refugees.

* DPI and media have joint objective of making world more aware of United Nations activities, Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information says.

* WHO says incomplete and harmful tuberculosis treatment practices threaten lives of HIV-positive people.

* IAEA General Conference elects eleven member States to Agency's Board of Governors.

* United Nations University to hold public seminar on likely consequences of powerful earthquake in Tokyo area.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

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The agenda of the United Nations must be shaped as if the Organization were being created anew, according to United States Secretary of State Warren Christopher. Addressing the General Assembly as it began its general debate today, he said the United Nations must direct its limited resources to the world's highest priorities, focusing on the tasks it performed best. Its bureaucracy should be smaller, with a clear organizational structure and sharp lines of responsibility. Each programme must be held to a simple standard -- it must make a tangible contribution to the freedom, security and well-being of real people in the real world.

It was necessary to end United Nations programmes that had achieved their purpose, and consolidate those that overlapped, especially in the economic and social agencies, Mr. Christopher continued. The Secretariat should be streamlined to make it more efficient, accountable and efficient. Proposals for new and extended peace-keeping missions should be rigorously scrutinized, and the Organization's ability to respond rapidly when new missions were approved should be improved. Finally, the effectiveness of the Security Council must be maintained. Germany and Japan should become permanent members, while all of the world's regions should be fairly represented.

There was no area where the United Nations could make a more significant contribution than in non-proliferation, the Secretary of State went on to say. He stressed the need for a comprehensive test ban treaty, and for negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. Meanwhile, the United States and the countries of the former Soviet Union should sharply reduce their strategic nuclear arsenals. The United Nations should also promote responsibility and restraint in the transfer of conventional weapons, with a view to ending the export of land-mines.

The United States had made a commitment to the Charter fifty years ago and was determined to keep it, including its financial obligations, Mr. Christopher said. Just as the founders of the United Nations had devised a new framework to deter aggression and armed conflict, the Organization must now assign the same priority to combating proliferation, terrorism, international crime, narcotics and environmental pollution. "We should dedicate our efforts in the United Nations and elsewhere to turning our global consensus against these threats into concrete action," he concluded. "We must renew and reform the United Nations not for its sake, but for our own."

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In an address to the General Assembly, Foreign Minister Yandja Yentchabre of Togo today called for greater attention to be paid to preventive diplomacy, disarmament and development. He welcomed the progress made towards peace in Liberia and Angola, but expressed concern over continued fighting in Sierra Leone. Saying Africa needed special assistance to participate in the global economy, he called for fairer prices for commodities, more transfers of technology, and a reduction in the continent's debt burden, which now stood at $313 billion.

The Foreign Minister said the development of Africa required the mobilization of financial resources through official development assistance and private investment. The international community should also do more to combat poverty. He noted that the number of poor people in Africa had risen from 105 million in 1985 to 216 million in 1990. Unless measures were taken, it could reach 304 million by the year 2000.

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The Foreign Minister of Norway, Bjorn Tore Godal, today called on governments to empower the United Nations to work with renewed vigour in promoting peace, human rights, sustainable development and international understanding. In an address to the General Assembly, he also voiced support for United Nations reform, restructuring and modernization, including the expansion of the Security Council. Citing the Organization's financial crisis, he said the assessment system should be reformed without delay.

To meet the challenges of peace and sustainable development, Foreign Minister Godal proposed five parallel paths for the United Nations and its Member States: an increase in local and regional capacity to handle conflict situations; an increase in the number of States contributing to peace-keeping forces; an improvement in the Organization's rapid reaction and stand-by capability; greater emphasis on conflict-prevention measures; and decisive action in promoting sustainable development and eradicating poverty. "As long as the gap between rich and poor, whether between States or within States, continues to widen, we cannot claim to be on the right track," he said.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has expressed strong support for the United States peace initiative in the former Yugoslavia. Meeting with Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke on Friday evening, he said he hoped that a successful outcome to the peace talks resuming tomorrow would enable the United Nations to reduce its troop levels in the region. He noted that the Organization was owed $3.4 billion, and that peace-keeping operations there were

costing $5 million a day.

Mr. Holbrooke briefed the Secretary-General on the progress made in the peace negotiations and outlined their possible future courses. He stressed the need for full implementation of the agreed measures to ease the siege of Sarajevo.

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The Secretary-General has called on the Abkhaz leadership to return to the negotiating table with specific proposals that will enable the peace process to move forward and permit the early return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes. He made that call on Friday, following a meeting with the Foreign Minister of Georgia, Alexander Chikvaidze. The Foreign Minister briefed him on efforts to find a political solution to the conflict in Abkhazia.

Noting with concern the recent rise in tension in the Gali region and the calls from some quarters to resolve the situation by a return to military action, the Secretary-General urged the continuation of maximum restraint.

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Sadako Ogata today urged the Croatian Government to reconsider a directive revoking the refugee status of tens of thousands of Bosnians in Croatia. The directive stated that the refugees would be returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina in cooperation with the Bosnian Government and Bosnian Croat authorities.

Mrs. Ogata said the ill-timed directive could mean the forced return of refugees to an area that was neither safe nor prepared to receive them. Such an action would violate the fundamental principle of non-refoulement contained in the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, to which Croatia was a signatory. Any large-scale repatriation must be dealt with in the context of the overall peace process, in accordance with international standards, she stressed.

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The Department of Public Information (DPI) and the media have the joint objective of making the world more aware of the activities of the United Nations, according to Assistant Secretary-General Samir Sanbar. Speaking on United Nations Television's World Chronicle today, he said the Department sometimes had difficulty explaining the Organization's position without offending any of the 185 Member States. It thus regarded the media as an ally which could disseminate important information to a wide audience.

Mr. Sanbar said the general public in the United States and elsewhere was generally supportive of the United Nations in principle, although critical of some activities in practice. He pointed out that the Organization had to respond to increased demands at a time of decreased resources. Those demands were also becoming more complex -- peace-keeping operations now had major humanitarian and political components and meant dealing with warlords and non-governmental groups.

The United Nations did not just look to Member States for financial and material resources, Mr. Sanbar continued. It also needed sustained political will to carry operations through to the end. He stressed the need for a culture of public information within the Organization, saying the DPI and the media were "two sides of the same coin."

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Incomplete and harmful tuberculosis treatment practices rob years of life from almost a third of all HIV-positive people, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). It said that the most common error in treating TB patients was failing to ensure that they took their medicine every day. Other errors included failing to diagnose TB in HIV-positive people, and prescribing the anti-TB drug thiacetazone, which could be fatal to them.

WHO estimated that 266,000 HIV-positive people would die from potentially treatable TB this year. It said patients could probably gain more than two years of healthy life with an improved TB treatment strategy known as directly observed treatment, short-course (DOTS). Under the DOTS regimen, health workers or volunteers ensure that patients take a combination of anti-TB medicines for a six-month period.

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The General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) has elected eleven member States to the IAEA Board of Governors. The eleven are: Bulgaria, Chile, Denmark, Egypt, the Republic of Korea, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Romania and Saudi Arabia.

The other 24 members of the Board of Governors are: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Slovak Republic, South Africa, Spain, Thailand, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uruguay.

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The United Nations University (UNU) will hold a public seminar on Wednesday to assess the likely consequences of a powerful earthquake in the Tokyo area. The seminar, part of a three-day international workshop, is being organized jointly with the University of Tokyo's International Centre for Disaster-Mitigation Engineering.

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